

WANDERERS' TITLE HOPES AT STAKE TOMORROW

27/3/75

Wycombe v Enfield preview by STUART EARP

THE race for the Rothmans Isthmian League championship could take a dramatic turn — or could even be decided tomorrow (Friday) when the top two clubs meet at Loakes Park.

At 3 p.m. Wycombe Wanderers and Enfield will face each other for the long awaited fixture between two old rivals, who with Dagenham, are currently contesting the league title this season.

Enfield, along with Wycombe one of the most successful clubs in the past 10 years, finished last season in an uncomfortable 18th position in the table. Success this season was imperative and to get it, they signed on almost a whole new team of experienced players.

Mick Lowe, Hillingdon's Borough goalkeeper for several years, came in the close season as did Brian Wilson from Walthamstow. Wilson had been Avenue's top defender for many seasons and both he and Lowe have done much to bolster Enfield's defence this term.

Another defender, this time a former full time professional, also signed on — Fred Callaghan. He was once the regular Fulham full back and came to Southbury Road on a free transfer. Another player signed on a 'free' was Peter Cruse, the former Slough, Arsenal and Luton forward.

Les Eason, who made over 500 appearances for Barnet in the Southern League, also joined with clubmate Billy Meadows. The latter has since

left for Wingate. Alan Jackett, a forceful midfield player, came from Hitchin.

£3,000 FEE

Enfield manager Tommy Lawrence completed his pre-season signings by acquiring the services of two strikers, in contrasting circumstances. The club paid out a sum of £3,000 for Hereford United forward John Ritchie, who was with Peter Cruse at Slough and Arsenal, and then discovered Dennis Gill playing in Athenian League football.

All these new players teamed up with last year's regulars, Tony Jennings, Kenny Gaine, Micky O'Sullivan, Phil Fry and Derek Baker. The net result was a string of victories that saw them race to the top of the table.

Coupled with Enfield's success, however, has been a whole string of bookings. At present they have amassed a total of 22 penalty points, two sendings off and 14 bookings — three more points than any other club. Gill has been sent off twice — once in a cup tie — and Ritchie once while the bookings tally reads: Fry 4, Ritchie 3, O'Sullivan 3, Jennings 2, Jackett 2, Cruse 2 and Gaine Wilson, Davis and Callaghan one each.

With their total growing rapidly, the club have recently appointed a sub-committee to investigate the disciplinary trouble.

Enfield's new manager, Ted Hardy, has also expressed concern over the number of bookings. Hardy took over from Lawrence three weeks ago when

the latter gave up the job for business reasons. Hardy so successful with Bishop's Stortford last season, was the obvious choice for the job.

Another reason for Enfield's dramatic uprise this year has been the arrival of Mr. Tom Unwin to the club. He came to Enfield in March and plans for a nightclub to be built alongside the clubhouse were soon put forward. The building is now complete at a cost of £125,000. He is hoping to build a gymnasium and sauna baths at the ground in the near future.

Enfield have lost only a handful of games this season. In the league they went down early in the term to Stortford 3-1 and soon afterwards fell to a surprise defeat 2-0 at Walton. Leatherhead are the only other side to have beaten them, 1-0. The club's best victories have come against Dagenham, Ilford and Dulwich.

In the F.A. Trophy, Enfield were tipped by many to end the Northern domination of the competition. But after beating Feltham, Cheshunt, Sudbury, Banbury (the last three after replays), and Dover, they lost 2-1 at Scarborough, former winners of the Trophy, in the quarter-final.

At the present time, Enfield top the table with six points in hand over Wycombe. Tomorrow's game could see that position change dramatically in front of what will be Wanderers' biggest home league game of the season.

Perhaps the biggest threat to the Blues is coloured centre

forward Gill. He is reputed to be the quickest front runner in the whole of the league and Enfield's policy of thumping long balls upfield for him to chase have accounted for many of their 75 goals this season. But there is also danger from Cruse and Ritchie, two experienced front runners.

Wanderers' defence, which has been so sound in recent matches, will come under its biggest test since the Middlesbrough games. If they play as well as they did then, the visitors will find it extremely tough to break through.

For Enfield, this will be also one of their most difficult matches of the season. Facing them is a Wycombe side currently showing its best form of the season. The Blues have won their last 10 league outings and are the proud holders of a formidable home league record.

Wycombe have not lost at home in the Isthmian League since November 21, 1972. The total record reads: Played 46, won 38, drawn 8; lost 0, goals for 112 goals against 32.

Wycombe are hoping Keith Mead will be fit after injuring his ankle at Leytonstone last Saturday and expect to field a full strength side.

For Wanderers, this 'battle of the giants' is worth far more than the three points at stake. Victory would give them a tremendous psychological boost in their bid to retain the title. On the other hand, if Enfield win,

Wycombe will have to rely on the Middlesex club losing at least two games before the end of the season.

Enfield found themselves in more disciplinary trouble on Tuesday night when three of their players were booked in the London Senior Cup semi-final against Leatherhead. Enfield lost 1-0 to a Johnny Doyle goal in the first 90 seconds.

Cruse, Callaghan and Fry were cautioned along with Doyle and Peter McGillicuddy of Leatherhead. Enfield came through without injury but now both Cruse and Ritchie are under threat of suspension.

Enfield may change the team that lost on Tuesday. Callaghan could drop out with O'Sullivan moving into the back four and Fry going from centre-back to left-back. The gap in midfield will be filled by either Cruse or John Tone.

ROTHMANS ISTHMIAN LEAGUE Division One (Up to 27/3/75)

| | P | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Enfield | 30 | 24 | 3 | 3 | 68 | 16 | 75 |
| Wycombe | 30 | 21 | 6 | 3 | 58 | 24 | 69 |
| Dagenham | 27 | 20 | 3 | 4 | 65 | 25 | 63 |
| Dulwich | 30 | 18 | 5 | 7 | 53 | 26 | 59 |
| Lrhead | 30 | 17 | 5 | 8 | 60 | 34 | 56 |
| Tooting | 30 | 16 | 6 | 8 | 42 | 34 | 54 |
| Ilford | 29 | 15 | 6 | 8 | 65 | 39 | 51 |
| Sutton | 32 | 15 | 4 | 13 | 46 | 40 | 49 |
| Slough | 31 | 14 | 5 | 12 | 55 | 39 | 47 |
| Oxford | 31 | 13 | 5 | 13 | 43 | 40 | 44 |
| Hendon | 32 | 12 | 5 | 15 | 47 | 56 | 41 |
| Wstow | 33 | 11 | 7 | 15 | 46 | 47 | 40 |
| Hitchin | 29 | 12 | 4 | 13 | 40 | 47 | 40 |
| Bishop's | 32 | 12 | 4 | 16 | 41 | 50 | 40 |
| Kings | 35 | 12 | 4 | 19 | 41 | 56 | 39 |
| Lingstone | 34 | 10 | 6 | 18 | 35 | 50 | 37 |
| Barking | 31 | 10 | 6 | 15 | 48 | 57 | 36 |
| Clapton | 33 | 11 | 3 | 19 | 42 | 66 | 36 |
| Hayes | 32 | 7 | 10 | 16 | 42 | 57 | 31 |
| Woking | 32 | 7 | 7 | 18 | 35 | 61 | 28 |
| Walton | 30 | 7 | 3 | 20 | 29 | 78 | 24 |
| Bromley | 32 | 5 | 1 | 26 | 20 | 76 | 16 |